

8 November 2020
23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Let me begin with a confession and what I am about to say may surprise you. But be careful about a quick judgement.

I know that at times I can be a jealous or an envious person. Jealous or envious of another person's talents, gifts and abilities. I would have loved to have played for Richmond, the tigers in my younger days.

I can be jealous at times when I see another person fix or repair something that may take me two days? They have gifts and talents I lack. Sometimes I find myself envious of the skills and achievements of others and even feel a failure. I recall my father who had little or no education able to fix anything.

Are you jealous or envious of the rich and famous – the celebrities who seem to have it all? Do you get not so much as jealous but annoyed at those in our community who seem to have no scruples or morality when it comes to issues that affect our community life? Would you like to be an accomplished organist or musician or an AFL star footballer, or the perfect partner, husband or wife. I suspect we all have our little secrets. I certainly do. We are at times regretful even jealous and envious that we do not have talents or gifts of others.

Jesus in today's Gospel as in last weeks and again in next weeks reading is aware of the context in which those who were his followers and others lived their lives. He was aware of their contradictions, differences, anxiety, doubts and disappointments and in particular the attitudes of those who exercised religious and political power. He was aware of how unhappy, probably a little exasperated they were of his teaching and expectations. I suspect not too much different from today.

Matthew's Jesus was aware of the plight of many including slaves, women, outsiders and those without any sense of concern for the other. He also knew about the jealousy of his disciples at times and their indifference to others. Jesus was aware that we all have not been given the same talents but was not concerned about the differences but rather how we used what has been given to us. Today's parable is intended to encourage us all to think about the gifts and opportunities that we have all been given, not to be disappointed or jealous or envious of what others have, but to use our gifts for the benefit not only of ourselves but for everyone.

The question posed for us today in the Gospel is, "How do we live our lives in the world of today with all its contradictions. What do we say to those who misuse or fail to appreciate the wonders of God's world but seek to destroy, ignore or fail to act when necessary?"

In today's gospel, we have the reverse of indifference and jealousy. Instead we are to be encouragers. We are to be delighted, inspirational, excited and enriched by the different gifts and talents we have all been given and to use them in a constructive way to build heaven on earth God's kingdom. We are not to hide them under a bushel or be envious of others with different gifts.

This Gospel reading is part of the great discourse of Jesus prior to his death. It projects the future in a worldview that reflects the language and imagery of the Jewish apocalyptic framework. Much of it makes little sense to us on a first reading- therefore we need to delve below the surface as we say.

None of us are comfortable with judgement, the second theme in today's readings and even more pointed in next weeks Gospel, the account of the Sheep and the Goats, although we are too often willing to judge others.

Over the past few Sundays, the readings we have heard from Matthew emphasise a number of points required of discipleship:

Namely:

1. Faithfulness - We are called to be faithful to God not to be successful as the world suggests. We are called to be faithful and regular in our prayer and worship life. As we gear up for Advent and the season of Christmas consider joining the faithful on Thursday mornings when I am planning to lead a 5-7 minutes segment about Mark's Gospel the centre of our readings in 2020.
2. Being prepared - How are your plans going for mission and outreach at Christmas? Have you thought about inviting and bringing Grandchildren to the 5pm service on Christmas Eve under the Gum tree? Encourage them to dress up.
3. Generosity - Let's support the Christmas Bowl with renewed enthusiasm.
4. Good stewardship - We are called to be good stewards of the resources given to us personally and as a community. Our Buildings suggest we are all aware of this commitment here at St George's. How may we use the other resources we have for mission and outreach?

Today's Gospel is found only in Matthew. It is similar to the parable of the Ten Pounds, found in Luke 19: 11-27. The difference is that in Luke the servants of God have one task, they are given the same talent to live out the faith. In Matthew they are given different talents, and they are expected to live out their lives according to the talents given. Jesus affirms those who use their talents wisely and condemns those who do nothing. But is there something strange about the parable? It seems to chastise the poor and affirm the rich, opposite to all Jesus has been saying and teaching. No, the point is not about wealth as money but rather the richness we can all gain by using whatever has been given to us, not for ourselves but for others. Remember the story of the widow's penny?

As always Jesus surprises and troubles us when he speaks as we do not expect him to. Here he subverts the established order, both politically and inside the Temple that spends time and energy looking after itself, defending self-righteousness and ignoring the plight of the other.

Why do you think the person given the one talent respond differently to the other? Was he jealous? Did he feel deprived or overlooked? Was he afraid or knew his place in the social order of the day?

Today's question for us: How do we use our talents, wealth to create and imagine a future to work in partnership with God to create God's kingdom? What are the barriers or obstacles we need to break through to enable this to happen? What is stopping us from taking opportunities or stopping us giving or stepping out into the unknown? Perhaps it is:

- prejudice
- fear
- self interest
- greed
- laziness

I know mine.

Brendon Byrne, Jesuit Theologian says:

"The gifts God has entrusted to us, our mind, limbs need active exercise if they are not to atrophy and wither.

The second reading from 1 Thess. 5: 1-6, coheres with this in the sense that believers as 'people of the day, who should be up and about, watchful and active, rather than asleep', as in the night.

Often the way we see things has a big impact on how we respond. In today's Gospel we are encouraged to step out in faith, to open our eyes and ears to see and use what God has given us both as a parish community and individually.

Amen